The Insider

Edward Jay Epstein: The phantom blockbuster

Book of the Month Club News

The Ultimate Assassination Book: A Story to Make Your Eyes Roll

Beginning in its March issue, the *Reader's Digest* will retail a new and startling assassination theory from the pen of respected investigative journalist, Edward Jay Epstein. Entitled *Legend: The Secret Life of Lee Harvey Oswald*, the book to follow is a Book-of-the-Month Club selection and is expected to be a major bestseller. The *Digest* certainly hopes so: it spent 500 G's researching the story.

Epstein was assisted in its preparation by two full-time researchers and—at 15 cents a page—ordered most of the 250,000 pages of the Warren Commission documents housed in the National Archives. He traveled to Mexico, reportedly to meet with Uri Nesenko, a KGB agent who defected to the U.S. with the Soviet Oswald file soon after the Kennedy shooting; to Iran, to talk to former CIA chief Richard Helms; to Japan; to Dallas.

Reader's Digest managing editor Fulton Oursler set up an interview for Epstein with George deMohrenschildt in West Palm Beach, Florida, last March. DeMohrenschildt was promised $1,000 a day for a maximum of four days of grilling by Epstein, but committed suicide the second day.

According to various sources, this is the heart of Epstein's thesis: Lee Harvey Oswald was sent by the CIA to a Russian-language school in Monterey, California, then to Japan with the Marines, and then on to the U.S.S.R.

Jack Ruby: As He Was

Jack Ruby: As He Is?

There, Oswald posed as a double agent for the KGB, passing on information to the Soviets about our U-2 flights to enhance his turncoat credibility. Epstein also allegedly suggests that the KGB plotted with the Cuban intelligence agency to assassinate JFK.

Epstein's explanation of Oswald's motives for shooting the President remains under tight embargo, but, within 32 hours of the assassination, he reports, the CIA and the KGB sought each other out to arrange to off Oswald (Apparently communication between the two cloak-and-dagger outfits was not unusual.)

Then—and it all gets harder to swallow at this point—the CIA contacted Ruby and asked him to shoot Oswald. At first Ruby turned down the assignment, explaining, reasonably enough, that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life in jail—or worse. Don't worry, said the Company—we'll help you simulate first cancer, then death, and afterwards slip you to a safe haven.

So, it is said, Ruby agreed, left jail for a hospital, was ultimately declared dead, and watched the world mark his passing while the CIA substituted another body for cremation. In other words, Ruby lives! And if *that's* true, Epstein will have no trouble passing off his book for $12.95—or $129.50. But it couldn't be true. It could *not* be true. It couldn't . . . •

Brown, Chavez Splitsville Over Grower-Geared Farm Board Choice

The strong political alliance between California Governor Jerry Brown and Cesar Chavez, head of the United Farm Workers Union (UFW), is beginning to break down. Long considered a key to any Brown presidential challenge in 1980, Chavez is now pulling back from the governor, whose administration, he claims, has allowed the state's farm labor law to work in the interests of the state's powerful growers.

Passed and signed in 1975, the farm labor law is the proudest and most touted Brown accomplishment, useful in selling the governor's goods to liberals disgruntled with Sacramento's increasingly conservative drift. But Chavez and other union leaders see Brown's appointment of San Jose attorney Harry DiLizzonna as chief counsel to the state's Agricultural Labor Relations Board as a threat to the UFW's sway over California's estimated 300,000 farm laborers.

Chavez says filings of unfair labor practices against several growers—including harassment of illegal aliens and refusal to bargain after union election victories—have been buried by the board, causing the 30,000 workers represented by the UFW to go without union contracts. Chavez says the situation could become critical because the union needs to triple its present membership to "make it into the future."

"DiLizzonna may be working for the growers the way he acts," says a peeved Chavez. "He's a terrible appointment." Chavez insists he won't endorse Brown in his reelection bid, despite the predilection of the governor's probable opponents toward prostrating themselves at the boots of the big growers.

—*Joel Kotkin*